



**U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom Hearing**

**Freedom of Religion in Afghanistan: One Year Since the Taliban Takeover**

*Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery*

**Abraham Cooper, USCIRF Vice Chair**

Thank you very much, Chair Turkel.

I would like to join in welcoming you all to today's hearing and add my thanks to our witnesses for taking the time to be here today.

As Chair Turkel outlined, the Taliban and their rivals ISIS-K have played a significant role in creating, maintaining, and escalating conditions hostile to freedom of religion or belief in Afghanistan.

Several important areas of interest we would like to discuss today include an overview of steps taken by the Taliban since they came to power that violate

freedom of religion or belief, and to better understand the Taliban's approach to addressing threats to religious freedom from other armed groups in the country and how they are falling short of international standards. Panelists will give an overview of U.S. strategy in deterring the Taliban's persecution of religious communities such as targeted sanctions, promoting human rights and religious freedom, and providing humanitarian relief to at-risk groups through USAID. We would also like to explore additional options for U.S. policy and how the U.S. government and international community can better work to protect Afghan religious minority communities.

We will also hear about U.S. Afghan Refugee Resettlement policy and the U.S. government's evacuation programs, and ongoing Afghan refugee resettlement process, including policy recommendations for the U.S. refugee resettlement process that can better support religious minorities at extreme risk of persecution.

Thank you all for being here and I will now turn the floor back to Chair Turkel.